



EUSBSR
EU STRATEGY
FOR THE BALTIC
SEA REGION

EUSBSR after 2020: Governance remastered?

FINAL REPORT



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Colophon

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The information and views expressed in the study do not necessarily reflect the views of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia.



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To develop this report a wide range of interviews with experts and implementers of the EUSBSR have been conducted.



Preface

The European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) was created in 2009 as the EU's first Macro-regional Strategy. Three other strategies have since been adopted. As such, the EUSBSR is on the one hand the most experienced of the MRSs, but on the other this means that it has to be an explorer of new ways and new solutions. To make the right decisions we need information and analysis, and the EUSBSR has been the subject of several reports supporting the exploration of new paths and offering new ideas.

This report by Spatial Foresight has been prepared for the EUSBSR 9th Annual Forum in Tallinn on 4 & 5 June 2018. The main theme of the forum is the Future of the EU Cohesion Policy and EUSBSR post-2020. Spatial Foresight involved many EUSBSR stakeholders in answering questions on how the strategy should evolve in the changing environment, especially in order to achieve the 'Save the Sea' objectives. To do this they prepared several practical proposals for the future development of the strategy and for all four MRSs. I believe they will form very useful input for the forum in Tallinn, for the upcoming task to renew the Action Plan of the EUSBSR and for preparations for the next MFF period starting from 2021.

Fellow friends of Baltic Sea cooperation, let's look forward together with this report!



Sven Mikser
Foreign Minister of Estonia

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Abbreviation list

BDF	Baltic Development Forum
CPR	Common Provisions Regulation (Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013)
CBSS	Council of the Baltic Sea States
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
ERDF	European Regional and Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
EUSAIR	European Union Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region
EUSALP	European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region
EUSBSR	European Union Strategy of the Baltic Sea Region
EUSDR	European Union Strategy for the Danube Region
HA	Horizontal Action
HAFP	Horizontal Action Focal Point
HAC	Horizontal Action Coordinator
HELCOM	Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission - Helsinki Commission
PA	Policy Area
PAFP	Policy Area Focal Point
PAC	Policy Area Coordinator
SI	Swedish Institute
VASAB	Visions and Strategies around the Baltic Sea

Looking back from the future

Tallinn, June 2028

EUSBSR key implementers gather today for the 56th capacity building workshop. There were fewer of these workshops in the last five years, which is good news because administrative capacity has improved enormously. In this workshop, it is difficult to categorise participants. About ten years ago, all were grouping Policy Areas (PAs), Horizontal Actions (HAs), National Coordinators, Policy Area Focal Points (PAFPs) and Horizontal Action Focal Points (HAFPs). Now there are different structures, some smaller, some bigger, but they all contribute to policies through multiple processes.

The theme of the workshop is **“A retrospective of 2018 discussions as a reminder for the upcoming 20th EUSBSR anniversary”**.

Reflecting back on EUSBSR objectives, how did operational implementation evolve over the last ten years? Let's look at the 'Save the Sea' objective.

In 2018, 'Save the Sea' was implemented through four sub-objectives and five PAs. Implementation was mainly through flagships in the form of projects, processes and networks. Becoming a flagship needed an idea very much in line with the PAs and with a macro-regional impact. In any case, it was Policy Area Coordinators (PACs) that supported flagship partners in their applications, advising or by finding additional partners or funding sources. Flagship labels used to add visibility to the results and contribute through their processes to the policy loop. However, the process of obtaining flagship status was not always harmonised and was sometimes cumbersome.

Flagship processes were therefore enhanced and sometimes even developed into thematic partnerships. This idea is also used today, in its improved version. Macro-regional strategies are not static, so processes are more long-term, for planning and priorities, as well as involving broader and continuous networks and partnerships. Besides, they are also more in line with the EUSBSR idea of being a policy coordination platform.

And for governance? The governance structure used to be way more complicated than today. The European Commission, the High Level Group, Member States, National Coordinators, PAFPs and HAFPs, PACs, Horizontal Action Coordinators (HACs) and Flagship Leaders were all key implementers of EUSBSR and the 'Save the Sea' objective. Other players such as regional

organisations (HELCOM, VASAB, CBSS, NGOs and other networks) also played a role. However, all this reflects a structure with 'many passengers but unclear who the driver is'. The extensive implementation layers of EUSBSR created confusion about what was driving the policy change.

Of course, the Steering Groups, also called Steering Committees, used to play an important role in 2018, too. Although they were often misunderstood as a separate governance element, they remain an important meeting platform, where governance players meet to discuss the strategic orientation of the different PAs, flagship processes, or other relevant issues. They are mainly made up of the PAFP / HAFP and link the national / policy level to the operational level of PAs / HAs.

2018 was also a time when discussions started about ways to take EUSBSR forward. In view of the 20th EUSBSR anniversary, let's recap the main points of these discussions.

The wide thematic focus and complex governance structure needed simplification. Adjusting EUSBSR priorities to the future challenges and trends was the first discussion point. Macro-regional strategies are flexible. Clustering and merging priorities, and developing synergies with regional organisations was the first step. Improving internal communication was also proposed. Nevertheless, EUSBSR implementation has always been down to its people and their commitment.

Another idea was to develop Thematic Partnerships. Inspired by the EU Urban Agenda, EUSBSR built on the commitment and ownership of its implementers, while continuing to cultivate the macro-regional mind-set. The idea was for committed players from different levels; local, regional and national authorities, European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) Managing Authorities, regional organisations, research institutions and NGOs, to work together on a common theme, while respecting the 3 NOs (no new institutions, no new funding, no new legislation) of the macro-regional strategies and EUSBSR governance flexibility. In this case, PAs could also be partnerships.

Another idea was to use Article 70 of the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR)¹ from ESIF. Firstly, this initiative was being looked at by EUSBSR, so there were not uncharted waters. Secondly this could maximise funding sources for cooperation. The alignment of funding is a difficult process, so Article 70 offers a way to simplify this. The idea also reflected an existing EUSBSR initiative, none other than the Managing Authorities networks. This needed even stronger commitment from the players.

Last but not least, came the idea of developing a Macro-regional Integrated Territorial Investment (M-ITI) based on ESIF Integrated Territorial Investments (ITIs), introduced in the CPR. ITIs are a flexible tool to implement territorial strategies in a more integrated way.² They allow Member States to implement operational programmes transversally, drawing funding from different priority axes of different operational programmes. This allowed EUSBSR to have its 'own funding' as well as administrative support from its intermediate governance body.

Ten years on, EUSBSR is going strong. It is part of the policy loop, influencing policy changes in the region. Ten years on, it is again time to discuss future trends, future challenges and future implementation. The first seeds were sown in 2018. Now the EUSBSR is even more flexible, is implemented through even more open processes, by even more committed players and is preparing for the future, post 2030. One lesson to be learned from all this progress, is not to be afraid of changes, but rather be bold, be open, be flexible.

The EUSBSR after 2020. Remastered?



EUSBSR remastered? It is about time for EUSBSR implementers to discuss what they wish to achieve after 2020. How does EUSBSR operate today? How does its governance fit with future changes? How will EUSBSR add value and

what are its goals after 2020? There is a need to restart and rethink why such a cooperation framework is necessary. How would the region look without EUSBSR? What is in it for the Member States? the public? the key implementers? Discussions around these questions can help design EUSBSR for post 2020 and beyond. This report gives some first insights to these questions.

“For the times, they are a-changin’ ”.³ EUSBSR develops at times when European ideals of solidarity, unity, peace, prosperity and democracy are questioned. When borders and territories seem to be opportunities to divide rather than unite. When the *“old road is rapidly agin”*⁴, it is time to acknowledge this and invest in new paths that can unite.

Things we do in one place impact development in other places and vice versa. Living in an interconnected world, things we do in one place often have an impact on other places and their development and vice versa. Therefore, policies, actions, plans and strategies need to be constantly considered in a wider context.

Territorial cooperation at macro-regional level is a must today. Today, more than ever, territorial cooperation is not a luxury, but a must.⁵ Macro-regional strategies are flexible coordination and cooperation frameworks that implement shared priorities through processes and projects. Adopted in 2009, EUSBSR is the first of four current EU macro-regional strategies. The Action Plan has been a living document, regularly updated to adapt to current challenges and opportunities for the Baltic Sea Region. The National Coordinators group has decided to start a new review of the Action Plan in Autumn 2018. Staying flexible and adjusting is key for the EUSBSR, as regional and European changes influence its implementation.

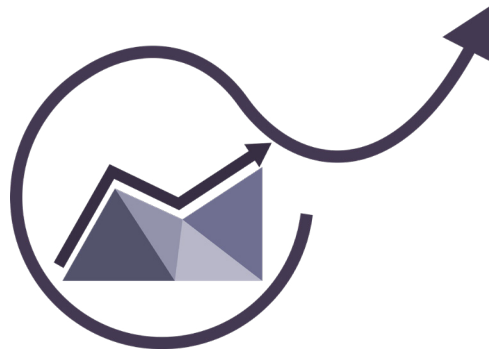
Macro-regional strategies can be driving forces for change with the right momentum.⁶ In a continuously changing world, macro-regional strategies can play an important role in driving policy change and coordination for regions. EUSBSR can set priorities

and objectives for the Baltic Sea Region and set the strategic framework for policy implementation.

This report sheds a first light on the future. Looking at EUSBSR after 2020 with future expectations and trends, sets the stage for the future framework and environment. However, to better prepare for the future, we should first understand the present. This report reviews *what* is currently done to implement EUSBSR by looking at the ‘Save the Sea’ objective, through the flagships and their implementation. Suitable governance structures are essential for implementation, so this report reflects on the current governance structure and how far it addresses current and upcoming challenges. Last but not least, this report gives food for thought to people working for the future implementation of EUSBSR.

Analysis in this report is based on the ‘Save the Sea’ objective. It draws on a thorough desk research of numerous studies, as well as a two-rounds of interviews with key EUSBSR implementers.

Where to for the Baltic Sea Region?



The future framework for EUSBSR. In a constantly changing world, EUSBSR implementation is impacted by many developments. Anything that influences the Baltic Sea Region, impacts implementation of the

EUSBSR. So, being flexible and adjusting to change is necessary for the macro-regional strategy. Developments can be trends or challenges at global, European, transnational, macro-regional or regional level and can influence the daily work and content of the Strategy.

What future trends are most relevant? A recent study from the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, 'Looking towards 2030: Preparing the Baltic Sea Region for the future'⁷, identifies many trends that can have an influence the Baltic Sea Region. These trends were linked to four themes:

Changing democratic decision making

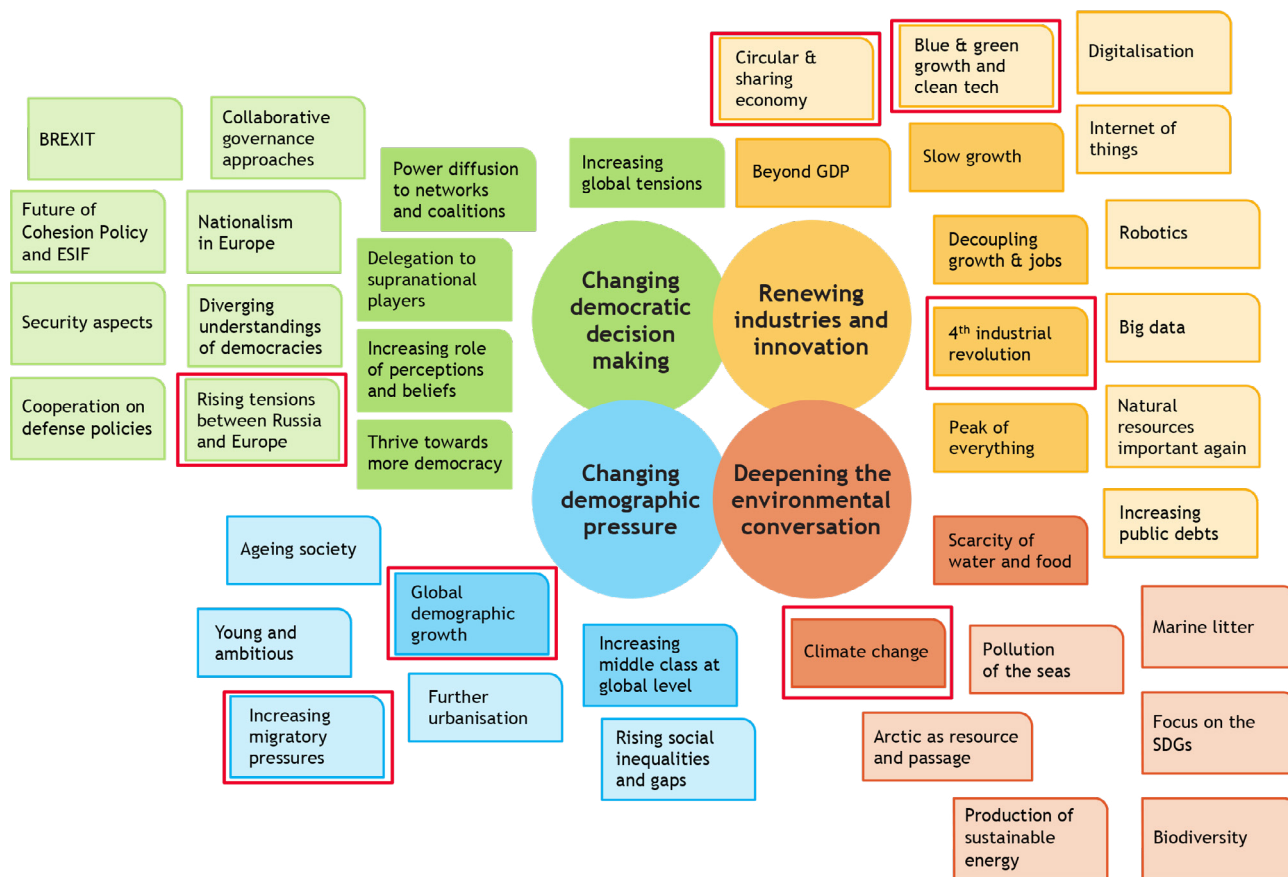
Changing demographic pressure

Renewing industries and innovation

Deepening conversations about the environment

Trends will influence the region and EUSBSR in different ways and to different extents. Some will help the Strategy achieve its objectives faster, while others may hinder its development and increase the need for stronger cooperation. Two types of trends are highlighted (see Figure 1): big social and value changes and pointing to paradigm shifts (darker colour) and trends concerning more specific markets and technologies (lighter colours).

Figure 1 Future trends for the Baltic Sea Region



Source: Spatial Foresight, 2018, adjusted from Böhme, K., Zillmer, S. Hans, S., Antikainen, J. & Pyykkonen, S, 2016, *Looking towards 2030: Preparing the Baltic Sea Region for the future*, Stockholm: Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (Tillväxtverket).

All these trends remain relevant today. Two years after completing the study ‘Looking towards 2030: Preparing the Baltic Sea Region for the future’, these trends remain relevant to differing degrees. Trends framed in red have become more pronounced. These are demography-related, such as increasing migratory pressures and global demographic growth, as well as geopolitical including rising tensions between Russia and European Union, but also the relation to the United States. Developments such as the circular and sharing economy, blue and green growth, and the 4th industrial revolution are gaining more importance and can bring new insights for future Baltic Sea Region development. Last but not least, the effects of climate change are still highly relevant, especially in a region where combating sea pollution is a priority.

New trends influence the Baltic Sea Region. The global environment is not static. This is shown by trends that have emerged in recent years. Their seeds already influence development of the Baltic Sea Region, and will play a role in implementation of EUSBSR and its objectives.

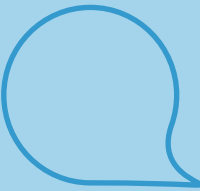
Defence, security and integration policy in response to the refugee crisis. The influx of people to Europe, and the Baltic Sea Region in particular, increased security actions such as fighting migrant smuggling, trafficking and illegal stays. At the same time increased cooperation between countries is needed on defence policies. On the other side, investing more on social aspects to increase social integration of refugees is necessary and education is to play a key role.

Uncertain future of Cohesion Policy and ESIF. With BREXIT, the future of Europe, the future of Cohesion Policy and ESIF remain uncertain. This will not only influence the Baltic Sea Region, but also implementation of EUSBSR, which largely depends on these developments. Ways for more efficient use of the funding need to be considered.

Pollution of the sea and marine litter need immediate actions. Sea pollution, especially from pharmaceuticals, eutrophication and marine litter are still threatening trends for the Baltic Sea Region environment. The Baltic Sea remains one of the most polluted in the world and continuous improvements in its environmental status are necessary. The State of the Baltic Sea report (HELCOM's holistic assessment), which will be finalised during 2018 also identifies those pressures.⁸ This trend is especially relevant for the 'Save the Sea' objective, its sub-objectives and priorities.

Digitalisation. Technological developments are already visible in everyday life and work. Technological progress needs to be considered for future implementation of EUSBSR and discussed by the PAs.

Renewable energies, sustainable development and biodiversity. Advances in renewable energies and sustainable development will benefit regional development in the Baltic Sea Region. At the same exploring the benefits of biodiversity further would bring new insights into the work of the Strategy and further development of the region. Here, EUSBSR can focus more on issues that will bring a positive outcome to the region.



***“For the future it is good to look at the global picture and how the EUSBSR can contribute to that. The UN Sustainable Goals could be a good starting point.”
Torfi Jóhannesson, PAC - Bioeconomy***

Think of the global picture. Baltic Sea Region developments contribute to European developments which contribute to global developments. From global trade to global sustainability goals, policy responses will be required. As global developments change, so do policy responses. The EUSBSR needs to work in this direction, too. Besides, working jointly on actions can bring global achievements faster. A characteristic example is the UN Sustainable Development Goals, to which the EUSBSR can contribute through its actions, benefitting itself and making the world a better place.

What role for the EUSBSR after 2020? Macro-regional strategies are cooperation frameworks that address macro-regional challenges. Macro-regional strategy actions need to be linked to overall regional development and contribute to changes in the region. The current objectives, sub-objectives, PAs and HAs of EUSBSR can cover most of the coming trends. Furthermore, not all objectives have yet been achieved. Nevertheless, there is a chance to assess the relevance and usefulness of different policies and objectives and plan how to best adjust them to face future challenges. Furthermore, the recent HELCOM Ministerial Declaration⁹ highlights and recognises the environment-related trends and challenges of the Baltic Sea Region. The role of EUSBSR after 2020 will certainly depend on the steps its implementers are willing to take and how far they are committed to implement them. This relates to the added value of macro-regional strategies and how far they strategically contribute to policy change.

What role for the EUSBSR ‘Save the Sea’ objective after 2020?

The ‘Save the Sea’ objective seems to thematically cover most of the trends described above. Some of these may positively influence development of the objective, helping achieve its objectives faster, while others will be hurdles for future development and more cooperation will be needed. The table below gives rough indications of the effects that the different trends will have on the ‘Save the Sea’ objective. Trends that imply increasing challenges are (-), while those with (+) are ‘easy gains’.

Table 1 - Links between future trends and the ‘Save the Sea’ objective and sub-objectives

Links between trends and EUSBSR sub-objectives	Save the sea			
	Ensuring clear water in the sea	Having a rich and healthy wildlife	Clean and safe shipping	Better cooperation
Paradigm shifts				
Increasing global tensions	-	-	-	-
Delegation of power to supranational players	+	+	+	+
Diffusion of power to networks and coalitions	+	+	+	+
Thrive towards more democracy				+
Increasing role of perceptions and beliefs				-
Global demographic growth			-	
Increasing middle class	-	-	-	
Beyond GDP				
Peak everything	+	+		
Decoupling growth & jobs				
4 th industrial revolution				
Changing understanding of privacy				
Changing roles of corporate and public players				
Hypermobility			-	
Collaborative governance approaches	+	+	+	+
Nationalism	-	-	-	-
Rising tensions between Russia and EU	-	-	-	-
Ageing society in Europe				
Young and ambitious societies				
Increasing migration pressures and flows				
Further urbanisation				
Rising social inequalities and gaps				
Circular economy	+	+	+	
Sharing economy				
Green growth & clean tech	+	+		
Blue growth	+	+	+	
Robotics & digitisation increasing productivity			+	
Robotics & digitisation replacing humans			+	
Big data			+	
Internet of things			+	
Natural resources becoming important again	-	+		
Increasing public debts	-	-	-	-
Alternative energy				
Increasing focus on transport hubs			-	

Source: adjusted from Böhme, K., Zillmer, S. Hans, S., Antikainen, J. & Pyykkonen, S., 2016, *Looking towards 2030: Preparing the Baltic Sea Region for the future*, Stockholm: Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (Tillväxtverket).

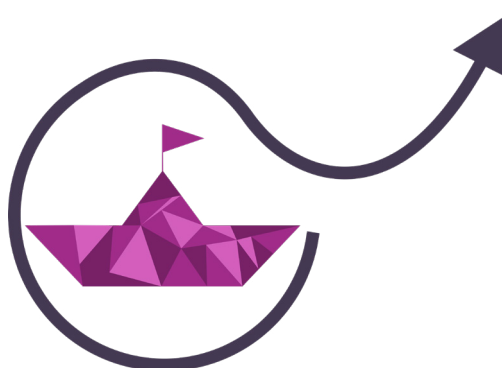
**“Changes are needed when the priorities change.
The EUSBSR can adjust to an environmentally, socially and
economically changing world.”**
**Rene Reisner, PA Hazards, PA Nutri,
Focal Point in Estonia**

To adjust for the future, we first need to understand the present. The future and its implications in the Baltic Sea Region in particular, is challenging. Trends and challenges emerge and need action. Is the EUSBSR ready to adjust for what is coming? Understanding the present will help prepare for the future. Looking at the current implementation and governance of EUSBSR would be a first step to preparing EUSBSR for the future. The next step is to see what can be improved, changed or advanced.

Does the current EUSBSR format fit its purpose?

Understanding today through ‘Save the Sea’. The EUSBSR functions under its Action Plan, a living document, regularly updated to adapt to challenges and opportunities for the Baltic Sea Region. How far does the current format fit its purpose? How easy is it to adjust to face future challenges? Using the ‘Save the Sea’ objective as a test bed, the current format of the EUSBSR will be explained both from an operational perspective, i.e. *what* is being done to implement the objective, and from a governance perspective, i.e. *who* is implementing the objective, through what processes.

What is done to implement ‘Save the Sea’?



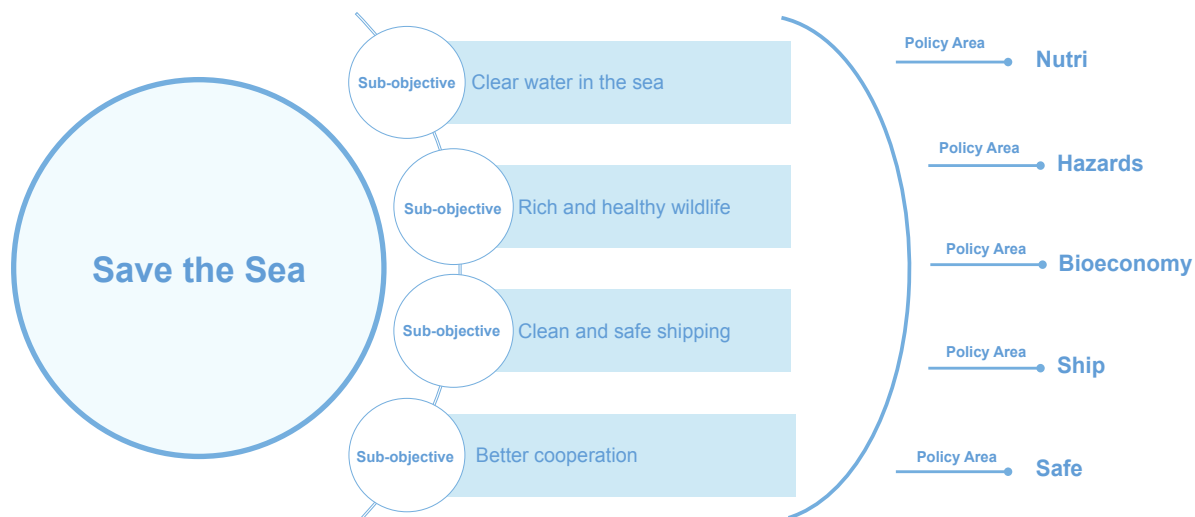
Flagships are the main implementation mechanism for the objective today. The following looks at how flagships are matched with the strategic framework of the objective and how far they contribute to its

fulfilment, to policy changes, political commitment and strategic implementation of the EUSBSR.

Spotlight on ‘Save the Sea’

The ‘Save the Sea’ objective is one of three objectives that implement the EUSBSR, together with ‘Connect the Region’ and ‘Increase prosperity’. The objective aims to address challenges related to water quality and maritime safety in the Baltic Sea.

Figure 2 The structure of the ‘Save the Sea’ objective



Source: Authors' own, based on information from the EUSBSR Action Plan¹⁰

The objective follows requirements of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and the Habitats Directive, to achieve good environmental status for the Baltic Sea by 2020. ‘Save the Sea’ works through four sub-objectives: ‘Clear water in the sea’, ‘Rich and healthy wildlife’, ‘Clean and safe shipping’ and ‘Better cooperation’.¹¹ Five concrete PAs better support implementation of the objective and its four sub-objectives. These are PA Nutri, PA Hazards, PA Bioeconomy, PA Ship and PA Safe (for the overall structure, see Figure 2).

‘Save the Sea’ is mainly implemented through flagships.

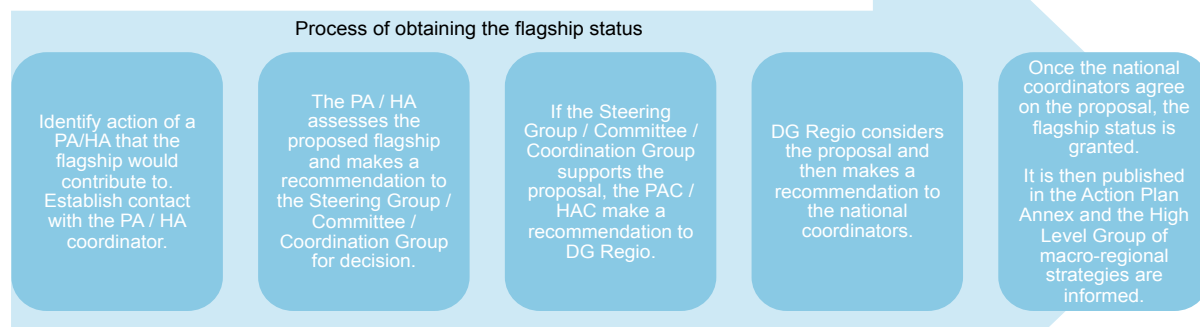
The Action Plan objectives and sub-objectives give the policy direction of the EUSBSR, it is up to the flagships to implement them. These are key implementing mechanisms of macro-regional strategies and function as stepping stones for long-term policy change. There are an impressive 31 flagships implementing the ‘Save the Sea’ objective¹², with other applications currently under discussion.

How to become a flagship

Projects, processes or networks looking to obtain the flagship label need to have a high macro-regional impact, contribute to the objectives and targets of EUSBSR, and be related to the implementation of one or more actions of a PA or a HA.

Flagships should also have a clear macro-regional dimension, i.e. include partners from more than one Member State in the region and clearly link to the objectives, indicators and targets of EUSBSR. They should be mature in their implementation, have a realistic timeframe, a clear financial and activity plan, an established partnership and be monitored and evaluated.¹³ The process of obtaining the flagship label is long, sometimes taking months and going through several steps, as described in the figure below. This figure shows the general approach as laid down in the Action Plan. Actual practices may vary across PAs.

Figure 3 How to become a flagship



Source: Authors' own, based on information from the EUSBSR Action Plan¹⁴

Be relevant, macro-regional and applicable. It is important to be strongly in line with the priorities and themes of the respective PA. Furthermore, flagships should have a macro-regional focus. Local projects, so small partnerships with a local focus, are usually rejected. The expected results also play a role in the selection process. For some PAs, flagships looking for results without being highly scientific would be an advantage, while others look at scientific projects, which can then be transferred to policy making.

PAs ensure links with strategic objectives. In many cases PACs meet flagship partners and support their application. This includes advice on how to better link project objectives to PA strategic objectives, or helping to find partners or funding opportunities. This results in better, more tailor-made project applications that fit the PA's priorities. To better link envisaged project results to strategic objectives, the PACs work closely with each other and sometimes direct project applications to other PACs, where the focus and outcomes would fit better. This support from the PACs results in very few project applications being rejected.

There remain a few gaps. Although most flagships are in line with the priorities of 'Save the Sea' and its sub-objectives, they do not always fulfil all the criteria. They may be very locally-focused, without macro-regional relevance or overlapping with other flagships. In such cases, the PACs usually assist the flagships to improve their applications and fill those gaps or, if not possible, reject the projects.

Flagship labels add visibility, enlarge the networks and reach the policy level. The flagship label is most important and useful for the flagships themselves. It gives them higher visibility, credibility for their results and broadens their networks. Flagship labels help communicate to a wider audience and promote the results to the policy level. As the Interact study 'Added value of macro-regional strategies from a project and programme perspective'¹⁵ emphasised, the flagship label offers visibility and dissemination at all stages of the project phase, so flagships receive more attention from decision makers and other players and can also help attract funding. However, the administrative burden can be a barrier, making potential relevant projects sometimes reluctant to apply. Sometimes the flagship label comes after the project has ensured its funding, sometimes before, while for some areas it does not matter what procedure comes first.

The process for obtaining flagship status is not always harmonised across PAs. Despite having some criteria for flagships as described earlier, the process is not always harmonised across PAs. In general, it is up to the PA and Steering Group / Steering

Committee members to organise both the criteria and the process for the project partners and the PA itself. Some PAs strictly follow the criteria and work with a 'checklist', while others work with the projects during their application, giving advice and discussing which projects to label. This is similar for funding, where in some cases relevant projects have to ensure their funding before obtaining the flagship status, while for others it works the other way around.

Flagships, as flagship projects, still matter. Flagships are a small part of the whole policy making process in the Baltic Sea Region. They bring desired change in the macro-regional development, however, they cannot trigger policy changes alone. Flagships develop methodologies, provide results and outcomes, as well as scientific knowledge and are tools for addressing macro-regional challenges. The results and outcomes of the flagships can then influence policy makers. Nevertheless, from their very nature their influence is limited, as projects are not designed to change policies.

“The flagships are changing to processes and the Steering Committees can drive these processes with support from the PACs in the future.”
Jouni Lappalainen, PAC Safe

Flagship processes as a solution for effective macro-regional objective implementation. The future calls for more flexible concepts, which can more easily adjust to changing reality and policies. Flagships, as projects, are short-term, have a definite lifespan and do not offer long-term flexibility. Furthermore, in some cases good ideas risk not being funded, if they lack flagship status, making labelling more of a challenge. Hence the discussions on the added value of flagships and thoughts about possible alternatives. One potential answer is to shift from macro-regional flagship projects to macro-regional processes. These processes would be implemented through interlinked activities, such as meetings, platforms etc. and operations, such as funded projects.¹⁶ The processes aim to address macro-regional challenges and involve long-term cooperation to achieve the PA objective of creating a broader policy impact. This approach already takes place in the EUSBSR, with some PAs and HAs taking it forward.

Stronger flagship processes needed. Flagship projects are still necessary to implement every objective. Macro-regional strategies are not static as they must adjust to a changing environment. Therefore, restricted projects, with set timeframes, limited partnerships and rigid priorities might not be a perfect



match. Processes may assist more long-term planning and priorities, as well as broader and continuous networks and partnerships. Besides, they are also more in line with the EUSBSR idea of being a policy coordination platform. Processes will again focus on actions defined in the Action Plan, build on transnational and cross-sectoral cooperation, establish a group of committed stakeholders, and develop a roadmap with objectives, targets and indicators, to bring the desired impact and change in the region.

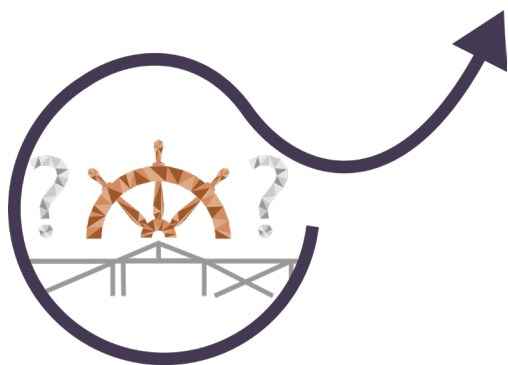
Through flagships, EUSBSR aims to contribute to regional change. Assessing the contribution to change and to macro-regional development is difficult. In the absence of a coordinated monitoring system or approach for macro-regional strategies, it is difficult to judge the exact link between projects and policy changes in the region. A clear intervention logic between EUSBSR strategic objectives, flagship objectives, as well as the eventual change in the region could show how EUSBSR activities can influence development in the Baltic Sea Region.¹⁷ This information is not yet streamlined.

Flagships are not assessed ‘ex-post’, but ex-ante, during their application and based on their objectives, focuses, envisaged results and their link to EUSBSR strategic objectives. Looking at ‘Save the Sea’, PAs mostly work together and have specific criteria linked to the thematic focus, ensuring links to the overall strategic objective.

Monitoring and eventually evaluating beyond administrative borders. To best link flagship outcomes to implementation of ‘Save the Sea’, or any other EUSBSR objective, and thus assess the contribution to policy change, continuous monitoring of EUSBSR and the region is necessary. This includes ex-post assessment of the projects, after their closure, to make this contribution visible. This exercise will help PAs, as they can only assess project results and in how far they contribute to regional development ex-ante, in their application. Nevertheless, the administrative burden and labour division need to be considered.

So far, there is no common monitoring system for the EUSBSR, or any other macro-regional strategy. However, there have been discussions and studies. A recent DG Regio study ‘Study on Macro-regional strategies and their links with cohesion policy’¹⁸ looked into different indicators, combining quantitative information with interviews and qualitative analysis. A recent workshop report prepared by Spatial Foresight on monitoring targets and indicators in the EUSBSR¹⁹ stressed the importance of looking at and comparing EUSBSR with the broader picture, which in this case is the development of the Baltic Sea Region. ESPON is also in the process of developing a monitoring system for all macro-regional strategies. Nevertheless, as a first step it is important to see what we need to know and how this information can be collected, harmonised and then contribute to Strategy objectives.

Who implements the 'Save the Sea' objective?



Flagships would not have been realised if it weren't for committed players to implement and take actions further. Therefore, it is important to look at who these players are, their current structure and the challenges they face. The

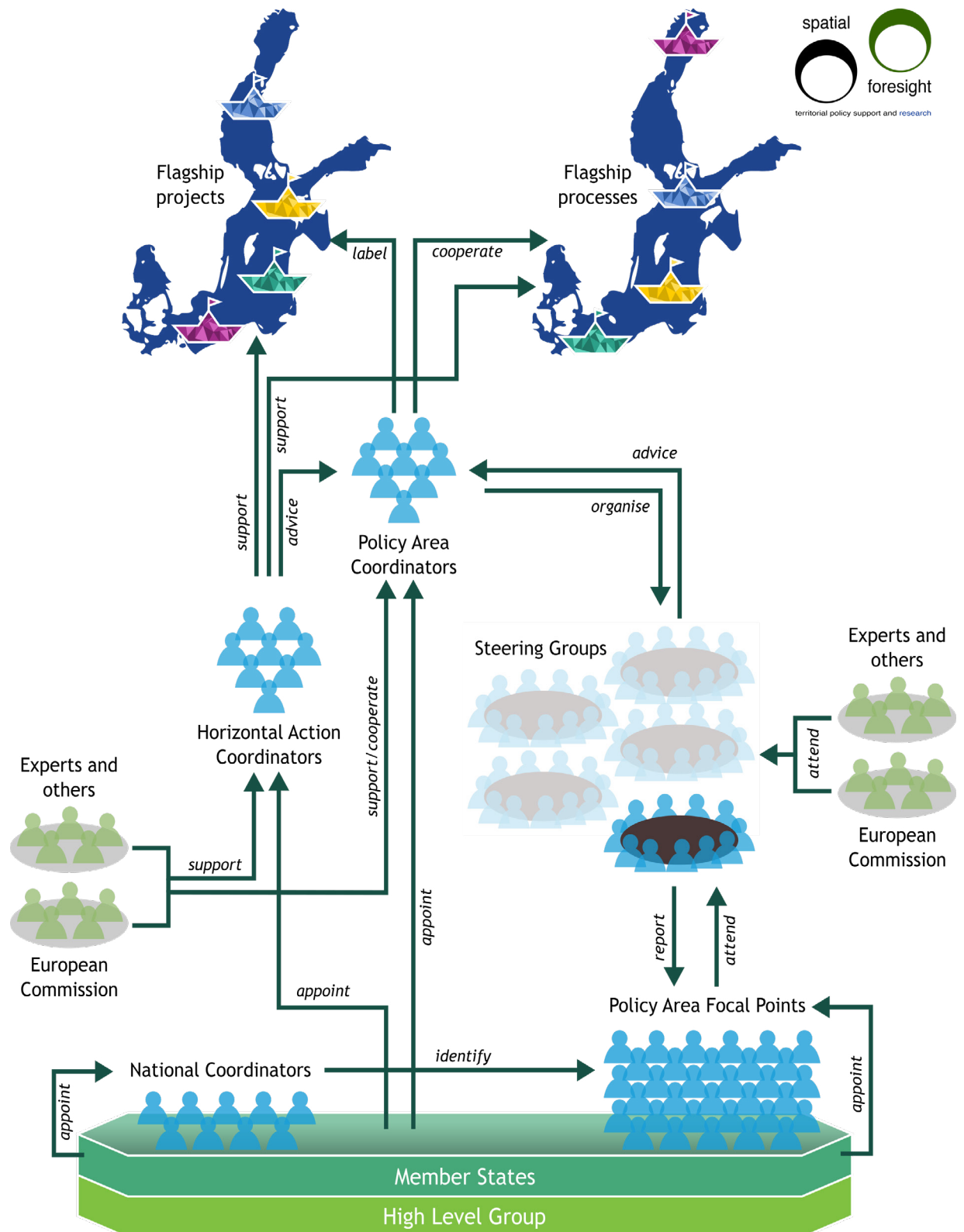
figure below shows the governance structure for 'Save the Sea'.

"The starting point for changes in the future of the EUSBSR would be stronger political commitment and increased ownership. We need to start from what the Member States involved in the EUSBSR would like to achieve through the strategy."

Maxi Nachtigall, PAC Hazards



Figure 4 The governance structure of the EUSBSR 'Save the Sea'



Source: Spatial Foresight, 2018

As the figure shows, the EUSBSR has a multi-level governance system, where different players mingle and share different roles and responsibilities. Nevertheless, the same people may participate in different functions in the system. All EUSBSR governance bodies have their role in keeping the system running. These roles and responsibilities are described below.²⁰

European Commission. The European Commission plays a key role in the strategic coordination of EUSBSR delivery, considering EUSBSR in policy initiatives and programme planning. The European Commission promotes and facilitates involvement, cooperation and dialogue with stakeholders from all levels. The Commission also facilitates EUSBSR implementation in cooperation with Member States (national coordinators, line ministries, bodies in charge of implementing programmes/ financial instruments, PACs, HACs) and consults regularly with Member States. In coordination with the PACs, the HACs and the national coordinators, the Commission updates the Strategy and Action Plan, as well as evaluating and reporting progress.

High Level Group. The High Level Group consists of senior civil servants from each Member State.²¹ It advises the European Commission on EUSBSR implementation and provides opinions on the review and Action Plan updates. It also proposes actions to be taken by the Commission and Member States to strengthen implementation of the Strategy. These include actions contributing to implementation of Council Conclusions on the review of the EUSBSR, identifying and addressing obstacles to effective implementation and offering proposals to promote the Strategy, developing new policies and aligning programmes and financial instruments.

Member States. Member States in the region are responsible for ensuring implementation of the EUSBSR as well as continuous political commitment. So, they intensify actions to enhance political support, recognise the need to include the EUSBSR on the Council agenda and find close links to EU policies. They also ensure that national and regional strategic planning, existing policies, programmes and financial instruments are in line with the Strategy. Member States also support the role of national coordinators in national coordination of EUSBSR as well as PACs and HACs in the thematic and transnational implementation of EUSBSR. The Member States appoint national, PACs and HACs and the PAFP / HAFP.

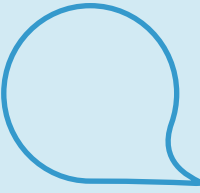
National Coordinator. The National Coordinator seeks support and commitment to implement the EUSBSR, cooperates with other National Coordinators to ensure coherence and support for EUSBSR implementation in the respective country by informing and consulting with national institutions, ensuring the involve-

ment of stakeholders and maintaining dialogue. National coordinators formulate and communicate national positions on EUSBSR and the Action Plan. They work closely with the European Commission, PACs and HACs, take part in the review and update of the EUSBSR and Action Plan and support implementation of the EUSBSR. National coordinators also promote visibility of the Strategy and encourage stakeholder participation. They monitor and, on request of the European Commission, report on implementation coordination activities. National Coordinators are typically high level officials from each Member State of the Strategy, in the majority of cases from the Prime Minister's office or in the majority of cases the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.²²

Policy Area Focal Points / Horizontal Action Focal Points. The PAFP / HAFP focal points serve as a liaison at national level for all matters regarding the PA / HA in the Baltic Sea region states. They participate in national coordination regarding the Strategy, provide information on the PA / HA to authorities when requested, assist in the visibility and communication of the Strategy and identify contact persons for PA / HA activities and flagships and liaise regularly with the PA / HA coordinators to be informed, contribute to the discussion and participate in EUSBSR activities. The PAFPs / HAFPs are represented by different line ministries of the Member States.

Policy Area Coordinators. PACs facilitate the involvement and cooperation of stakeholders from the macro-region. They also implement the PA in line with the target and indicators and review these when needed. They review the PA relevance to the Action Plan and propose changes and modifications to the European Commission, if necessary. They facilitate policy discussions and develop actions and flagships in the region for the PA. They also ensure stakeholder cooperation, communication and regular dialogue with other PACs, as well as the visibility of the PA. In addition, they monitor progress within the PA and report on it. PACs also facilitate the Steering Group / Steering Committee meetings and the day-to-day work included in this. PACs represent national or regional administrations and institutions or inter-governmental organisations.

Horizontal Action Coordinators. Their tasks are similar to PAC tasks, though instead of PA implementation they focus on the HA they are responsible for. HACs represent national or regional administrations and institutions or inter-governmental organisations.



“Effective coordination requires more streamlined dialogue and internal communication between the stakeholders implementing the EUSBSR.”
Jenny Hedman, PAC Hazard

Flagship Leader. The flagship leader is responsible for implementing the flagship. They closely cooperate with the PA / HA coordinators, participating in meetings and regularly reporting on progress of the flagship. They also translate flagship results into policy messages, establish and maintain cooperation with other flagships, exchange information and ensure communication of the flagship and its results.

Further to the players listed in the Action Plan, other play an important role. These include the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), HELCOM and other organisations, NGOs, municipalities, academics, research centres, as well as businesses. Special efforts are made to bring in more businesses as flagship partners, as these can function as a ‘reality check’, testing whether project results can be applicable in the region, or whether they have credibility after the project finishes. However, these partnerships alone cannot influence policy change if the messages do not reach a higher policy level. Furthermore, several networks and cooperation platforms play a role in implementing the ‘Save the Sea’ objective, either as EUSBSR key implementers or as project partners and general observers. For example, HELCOM is a core player in the region when it comes to ‘Save the Sea’ and can influence policy making, as HELCOM actions are documents which are followed in the region. Other prominent organisations are CBSS, Union of Baltic Cities, WWF, Coalition Clean Baltic, but also Baltic Port Organisations, International Maritime Organisation and International Association of Marine Aids to Navigation and Lighthouse Authorities, which are very important particularly for PA Ship and PA Safe.

“The Steering Groups serve as a forum for dialogue and discussion for the implementation of the PA and cooperation with other PAs, development and implementation of flagships, dialogue among flagships, as well as other related activities.”

Baiba Zasa, PA Nutri, Focal Point in Latvia



The Steering Groups (also called Steering Committees or Steering Coordination Groups) - a hidden gem in EUSBSR governance

Steering Groups / Steering Committees as an important meeting platform for players. The Steering Groups / Steering Committees are a hidden player in EUSBSR governance and play a crucial role in policy development and influence. They are often misunderstood as a separate governance element, although they are an important meeting platform, where players of other governance elements meet to discuss the strategic orientation of PAs, flagship processes, or other issues.

How are the Steering Groups / Steering Committees formed?

According to the EUSBSR Action Plan, they are developed to facilitate the involvement of stakeholders, as well as cooperation. The Steering Groups / Steering Committees are set-up and chaired by PACs / HACs. Their core structure is composed of PAFPs / HAFPs, which are appointed by the different Member States. Their members are appointed on a functional and not personal basis and are mostly representatives of national ministries or agencies connected to the PA / HA, implying that all members have similar knowledge of topics to be discussed. These members are standard for every Steering Group meeting.²³

Further to the national representation, other members of Steering Groups / Steering Committees can be experts, flagship leaders, interested ministries or agencies, Managing Authorities of EU programmes, etc. Each Steering Group / Steering Committee sets its own procedures and rules and sets its own terms of reference. Each is also free to decide the role it would like to have, e.g. an advisory group, a coordinating group, or something else. Each PA / HA should have only one Steering Group / Steering Committee and where possible use existing cooperation frameworks and platforms. On average, the Steering Groups / Steering Committees meet twice per year, while other communication means, such as emails and e-meetings are also used.

Tasks of the Steering Group. Steering Groups / Steering Committees support the work of the PA / HA by:

- Facilitating policy discussions in the Baltic Sea Region regarding the PA / HA;
- Recommending further policy changes at the appropriate level to facilitate the achievement of the EUSBSR objectives;
- Serving as a liaison between the national level and the PA / HA level, communicating flagship results and other good practices to the national level, or introducing policy discussions in Steering Group meetings to the PA level.

- Assessing applications for the seed money facility;
- Deciding and approving flagship labels;
- Serving as liaison between the national level and the PA level.²⁴

Steering Groups / Steering Committees connect two layers of EUSBSR governance. The most important role of the Steering Groups / Steering Committees is to link the national level, that they represent, and the operational level of the PA / HA. This way, they can ensure that good practices and flagship results can be communicated to the national level, while current policy topics can be taken into account by the PAs / HAs, with discussions and knowledge exchange between Member States.

Who do Steering Group / Steering Committee members work closely with? Apart from the respective PA / HA and their line ministry, Steering Group / Steering Committee members work closely with other PAs / HAs, different European Commission DGs as well as other regional organisations where relevant. VASAB, HELCOM, CBSS and Baltic Development Forum (BDF)* are among those ones they closely cooperate with. Others include research communities and NGOs.

“The Steering Groups support the implementation of the PAs by providing advice and assistance, agreeing on actions and contributing to policy discussion.”

Sanni Turunen, PAC Nutri

Many passengers but who is the driver? The extensive implementation layers of EUSBSR also create confusion on what drives policy change. Is it the projects? Is it the dissemination of their results? Is it the communication of the Strategy? Or is it a top-down process, where the political level is the only one deciding policy, which other layers should follow and adjust to? Certainly, the different players are all interconnected and share a piece of the EUSBSR puzzle, which they need to bring together with clear responsibilities, without getting puzzled themselves.

Complicated and changing governance. Too many governance layers in the EUSBSR system seem to create confusion and complexity. In some cases, it is not always clear what level is represented where, or who participates in which meetings. In addition to this, staff changes make the structure and communication even more complicated. Investing in keeping people's commitment would be a first step towards simplicity.

*The BDF will close its activities in summer 2018.

Does the EUSBSR need a EUSBSR Ambassadors Club? EUSBSR needs to be driven by committed stakeholders, who share ownership of its implementation. However, this ownership is not shared among all players, with some having little interest or involvement in the macro-regional processes. A EUSBSR Ambassadors Club may be worth involving in macro-regional strategies with players who feel committed and want to be involved, spending time and resources for the Strategy. The Strategy should anyway be built on cooperation and efforts from engaged players, who share a common cooperation mind-set.

How can macro-regional governance systems be assessed?

Looking at the maturity level of the macro-regional strategies. One way to assess the maturity of the EUSBSR would be to identify the development phase of the Strategy. The DG Regio ‘Study on Macro-regional strategies and their links with cohesion policy’²⁵ identified three phases based on the different capacity levels of the players involved in the strategies (see next chapter for more information).

Assessing governance capacity. Another way to assess the current government capacity is to use the GOCAPASS tool. The first findings on the EUSBSR structure are based on an external perspective. The GOCAPASS tool²⁶ enables diagnostic assessment of macro-regional governance systems. The tool can “identify, measure and monitor functions and capacities within complex governance systems” and allows its users to map their cooperation, decision-making and implementation capacities.²⁷

The GOCAPASS tool envisages the implementation of different steps. These include data collection and analysis, such as document review, interviews, surveys, network analysis etc., as well as the visualisation of the results to compare with other networks based on indicators over time.

The data analysis can be structured based on a “Structure - Contents - Processes” grid, according to which each criterion / function will be reviewed (see the three columns in the figure). This process will ease the ratings from the data of the different sources.²⁸

The guiding questions, structured along four core dimensions, help users to structure their answers based on the methods they have used. Users answer questions on each dimension, based on their research and sources, giving a score between 0 (not developed) to 2 (strong).

The GOCAPASS tool also offers a visualisation of the results, such as a “traffic light dashboard” that displays in colours the status of the different capacities described before. Thus, 0 is displayed in red (=weak), 1 in orange (=intermediate) and 2 in green (strong).²⁹

The total score gives a fair assessment of governance functions and capacities. The following two figures show how the diagnostic tool works. The first figure is the diagnostic tool with the questions to be answered through the analysis and the methods described earlier. The second figure is a visualisation of an example. This example is purely theoretical to show how the results of the tool can be visualised.

D1 - Capacities for Policy Decision-Making				
ID	Functions	Structure	Content	Process
1.1	Analysis for Decision-Making	Structures and bodies in charge of analytical work to support decision-making on objectives / implementation?	Documents and reports that reproduce the outcomes of analysis for decision-making on objectives / implementation?	Procedures and protocols that facilitate that there is analytical work that supports decision-making?
1.2	Translation of needs into action	Structures and bodies that translate (transnational) needs into objectives / action?	Documents and reports that reflect how the analysis of needs links to decision-making on objectives / action?	Procedures and protocols that facilitate that analytical work is fed into decision-making?
1.3	Responsibilities	Structures and bodies are clearly defined with regard to their responsibilities?	Documents, reports and knowledge (stories) that reflect how responsibilities are distributed and what they imply?	Procedures and protocols are in place to support the assigned responsibilities and related processes?
1.4	Vision- and Goal-setting	Structures and bodies in place to create common visions for the future and link them to operational goals and actions?	Documents, reports and knowledge (stories) that reproduce the common visions and operational goals of the system?	Procedures and protocols are in place to build and update common visions and goals for the system?
1.5	Priority-setting	Structures and bodies in place to prioritise goals and actions according to objective criteria?	Documents, reports and knowledge (stories) that reproduce the priorities and decisions to prioritise actions and goals?	Procedures and protocols are in place to take decisions on priorities and to find objective criteria to prioritise ?
1.6	Reflection and Feedback	Structures and bodies in place to reflect on achievements and performance and to feed reflections into decision-making?	Documents, reports and knowledge (stories) that reproduce reflections on achievements and performance?	Procedures and protocols are in place to support evaluation, reflection, and feedback into decision-making?
D2 - Capacities for Implementation				
ID	Functions	Structure	Content	Process
2.1	Connection to budgeting	Structures and bodies in charge of implementation and budgeting are connected?	Documents and reports that reflect the decisions on budgeting (earmarking) in line with objectives / implementation?	Procedures and protocols that facilitate connecting decision-making with budgeting and earmarking?
2.2	Availability of resources (human, technical, financial)	Structures and bodies that make resources available, raise funds and spread the knowledge about it?	Documents and reports that contain information on available resources or commitments to make them available?	Procedures and protocols that facilitate that resources are made available and that knowledge about it is spread?
2.3	Organising implementation	Structures and bodies that organise implementation or support implementation?	Documents, reports and knowledge (stories) that state how implementation is organised or supported?	Procedures and protocols that facilitate the implementation and the support to the implementing actors?
2.4	Monitoring and control mechanisms	Structures and bodies that are in charge of monitoring and control of projects and implementation?	Documents, reports and knowledge (stories) that inform about the implementation progress (monitoring)?	Procedures, indicators and protocols that facilitate the monitoring and control of projects and implementation?
2.5	Engagement of stakeholders	Structures and bodies that are in charge of engaging other stakeholders in implementation?	Documents, reports and knowledge (stories) that inform about the engagement of other stakeholders (who, how, why)?	Procedures and protocols that facilitate the engagement of other stakeholders (local, private, other countries)?
D3 - Capacities for Cooperation				
ID	Functions	Structure	Content	Process
3.1	Coordination of decisions	Structures and bodies in charge of coordinating decision-making are in place at the different levels?	Documents and reports that reflect the coordination of decisions (processes, outcomes)?	Procedures and protocols that facilitate the process of coordinated decision-making at the different levels?
3.2	Communication	Structures that facilitate internal and external communication between stakeholders are in place?	Documents and reports that reflect the conditions for communication and communication outcomes?	Procedures and protocols that facilitate internal and external communication between stakeholders are in place?
3.3	Information exchange	Structures and bodies that facilitate the exchange of relevant information at the different levels are in place?	Documents, reports and knowledge (stories) that reflect the exchange of information at the different levels?	Procedures and protocols that facilitate the process of information exchange at the different levels are in place?
3.4	Knowledge Management (KM)	Structures and bodies in charge of organising and managing the shared information are in place?	Documents, reports and knowledge (stories) that reproduce and inform about the knowledge management?	Procedures and protocols that facilitate knowledge management at the different levels are in place?
3.5	Active cooperation in policy-making and implementation	Structures and bodies in charge of active cooperation (joint implementation) in policy-making and projects?	Documents, reports and knowledge (stories) that inform about active cooperation (joint implementation) in policy-making and projects?	Procedures and protocols that facilitate active cooperation (joint implementation) in policy-making and projects?
D4 - Enabling Environment				
ID	Functions	Structure	Content	Process
4.1	Leadership	Structures and bodies that support and promote leadership within the macro-regional governance?	Documents, reports and knowledge (stories) that reflect the leadership within the governance system?	Procedures and protocols that support and promote leadership within the governance system ?
4.2	Mutual support (within the system)	Structures and bodies that facilitate mutual support within the macro-regional governance?	Documents, reports and knowledge (stories) that inform about mutual support within the governance system?	Procedures and protocols that facilitate mutual support within the governance system?
4.3	Learning facilities in the system	Structures and bodies that facilitate learning within the macro-regional governance?	Documents, reports and knowledge (stories) that reflect learning (processes, results) within the governance system?	Procedures and protocols that facilitate learning and development within the governance system?
4.4	Openness and adaptability (learning from others)	Structures and bodies that facilitate openness to the environment and adaptive change as a response to external influences?	Documents, reports and knowledge (stories) that reflect openness to the environment and adaptive change as a response to external influences?	Procedures and protocols that facilitate openness to the environment and adaptive change as a response to external influences?
4.5	Commitment of the environment	Structures and bodies that invite/ incentivise external actors to commit to the macro-regional governance?	Documents, reports and knowledge (stories) that report on the commitment of external actors to the macro-regional governance?	Procedures and protocols that invite/incentivise external actors to commit to the macro-regional governance?

GOA - Governance Assessment Tool

GOA Government Assessment Scorecard



Strong = Well developed, addressed, documented, defined

Weak = partially developed, addressed, documented, defined

Not developed= NOT identified or addressed, NOT defined or documented

	<i>Rating</i>	Not developed = 0 Weak = 1 Strong = 2	Not developed = 0 Weak = 1 Strong = 2	Not developed = 0 Weak = 1 Strong = 2	
	<i>Functions</i>	Structure	Content	Process	<i>Functional Sub-Score</i>
1.1	1.1 Analysis for Decision-Making	0	1	1	2
1.2	1.2 Translation of needs into action	1	0	0	1
1.3	1.3 Responsibilities	2	1	1	4
1.4	1.4 Vision- and Goal-setting	2	2	2	6
1.5	1.5 Priority-setting	1	0	1	2
1.6	1.6 Reflection and Feedback	0	0	0	0
D1 Sub-Score	Capacities for Political Decision-Making	6	4	5	15
2.1	2.1 Connect to budgeting	0	0	0	0
2.2	2.2 Availability of resources (human, technical, financial)	1	0	0	1
2.3	2.3 Organising implementation	2	1	1	4
2.4	2.4 Monitoring and control mechanisms	0	0	0	0
2.5	2.5 Engagement of stakeholders	1	0	0	1
D2 Sub-Score	Capacities for Implementation	4	1	1	6
3.1	3.1 Coordination of decisions	2	0	0	2
3.2	3.2 Communication	2	1	1	4
3.3	3.3 Information exchange	2	0	1	3
3.4	3.4 Knowledge Management (KM)	0	0	0	0
3.5	3.5 Active cooperation in policy-making and implementation	1	1	1	3
D3 Sub-Score	Capacities for Cooperation	7	2	3	12
4.1	4.1 Leadership	2	0	1	3
4.2	4.2 Mutual support (within the system)	2	1	1	4
4.3	4.3 Learning facilities in the system	2	1	0	3
4.4	4.4 Openness and adaptability (learning from others)	0	0	0	0
4.5	4.5 Commitment of the environment	1	0	0	1
D4 Sub-Score	Enabling Environment	7	2	2	11
Total-Score	All Dimensions	24	9	11	44

Source of the two figures: Haarich N. S., 2018, Building a new tool to evaluate networks and multi-stakeholder governance systems, Evaluation, Vol. 24 (2), pg. 202-219 and Haarich, S., 2016, The GOA tool - assessment of macro regional governance systems, Spatial Foresight Brief No. 6, Heisdorf: Spatial Foresight.

The EUSBSR after 2020 remastered. Ideas from *in vitro* to *in vivo*?



Which way for the EUSBSR after 2020?
Different paths depend on where the key implementers wish to drive the Strategy. Given the Strategy's unique and flexible governance structure, the question is how the

Strategy can ensure broad participation and commitment, and how it can evolve in a changing environment after 2020.

Essential precondition: Think the EUSBSR maturity level first. The DG Regio 'Study on Macro-regional strategies and their links with cohesion policy' identified three macro-regional strategy development phases. Phase I is about the individual capacity of the strategy players. Phase II refers to internal institutional capacity and performance of the macro-regional strategy, as well as external stakeholders' institutional and individual capacity to respond. In phase III, macro-regional strategy implementers and external players work in cooperation to achieve the respective objectives. Taking a step back for some EUSBSR self-reflection would help design better tailor-made responses.³⁰

“Now it is an opportunity to discuss about the EUSBSR post 2020, take time for this and prepare well for its future.”
Darius Liutikas, PAC for Bioeconomy
(Rural Development)

Future food for thought for different tastes. Several ideas can serve as food for thought to provoke discussions about the future possible role of EUSBSR. These are based on the extent to which implementers feel it is time for smaller or bigger advances, or what is realistic to take forward. The following is just inspiration for designing the next steps.

Develop stronger synergies with Interreg - simple but risky

The EUSBSR and the Interreg Baltic Sea Programme have a similar geographical area and are closely linked. On this basis, it is possible to further develop their strategic and thematic alignment and coordination.

Further strategic and thematic alignment. The DG Regio ‘Study on Macro-regional strategies and their links with cohesion policy’ recognised the need for stronger strategic and thematic alignment between macro-regional strategies and ESIF priorities, which would allow for more funding alignment.³¹ In EUSBSR terms, this could mean aligning priorities to the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme, so that funding operations becomes easier.

Provide funding support. Interreg is the main funding source for EUSBSR flagships. With a stronger thematic alignment, funding alignment would be easier and could continue in the next programming period. Furthermore, more efforts for finding funding from other sources need to be considered.

What would be the added value for Interreg? This question of course remains for Interreg programmes and, with EUSBSR, for the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme. The Interact study on the ‘Added value of macro-regional strategies from a project and programme perspective’³² identified that macro-regional strategies can offer a strategic umbrella for programmes with synergies, though Interreg programmes would especially benefit from good quality flagships, their dissemination and visibility.

Improving flagship visibility. Certainly, good communication and the visibility of flagships under EUSBSR is a first step. Both EUSBSR and the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme aim for further regional development of the Baltic Sea Region. However, assessing the contribution to change and to macro-regional development is difficult. In the absence of a coordinated monitoring system or approach for the EUSBSR, it is difficult to judge the exact link of flagships with Interreg projects and policy changes in the region.

Institutional assistance. In addition to the funding opportunities, institutional support seems to help, especially transnational cooperation programmes. The DG Regio ‘Study on Macro-regional strategies and their links with cohesion policy’ suggests that transnational programmes could coordinate transnational cooperation proposals and funding, as currently done by Managing Authority networks, to facilitate cooperation at a transnational level, beyond single projects.³³

The Managing Authority networks are networks established by Managing Authorities of different ESIF. Currently, in the Baltic Sea Region there is a European Regional and Development Fund (ERDF) Managing Authority network, a European Social Fund (ESF) Managing Authority Network and a European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) Managing Authority network in place. They support the implementation of the EUSBSR by ensuring that the ESIF-funded projects include relevant transnational elements, where suitable.³⁴

What is in it for EUSBSR?

Following this idea, EUSBSR will be a tool for delivering Cohesion Policy, while ESIF would become an important, if not the only, funding source of the Strategy. This would be an improved ‘business as usual’ scenario, where the Strategy develops in the same structure with some improved synergies. The question is, how much of a long-term perspective is this. How interdependent would EUSBSR and most prominently the Interreg Baltic Sea Region be? What risk is there that EUSBSR becomes a programme in itself, or becomes obsolete in the long-term?

Another point to consider at this stage is the future of flagships. There is already a shift from projects to processes. Further linking EUSBSR with the Interreg Baltic Sea Region programme risks flagships being seen as processes and being transformed to purely new Interreg projects.

EUSBSR implementation depends first and foremost on its players. A closer link to Interreg funding and administration could create a ‘fig leaf’ of non-committed players, who would no longer feel responsible for EUSBSR implementation, as it is covered by Interreg.

Another question to bear in mind is how far Interreg programmes can contribute to macro-regional strategies in the next programming period. This is especially relevant for the available funding, given the current BREXIT and post-2020 budget discussions.

Initiate some first simplification actions - self-reflective

EUSBSR is implemented through many PAs which address a variety of topics and challenges for the Baltic Sea Region. At the same time, it is implemented through a unique and flexible governance structure, which involves people from many different policy sectors, all EU Member States in the Baltic Sea Region plus neighbouring countries. The excess of topics and governance structures sometimes creates confusion even among EUSBSR key implementers. This could benefit from simplification.

Direct EUSBSR objectives and PAs more towards future trends and challenges. The Strategy develops in a constantly changing environment where different regional, transnational and global trends can influence implementation to a greater or lesser extent. Given its flexible nature, EUSBSR should adjust to such trends and challenges as much as possible. It is time to reflect on objectives and PAs that consider these trends or that are affected by these trends, which have macro-regional relevance and which require macro-regional cooperation. Developing closer links and synergies would prepare the EUSBSR better for the future.

Integration of objectives and PAs to take global priorities into account. Several efforts at global level aim to tackle global challenges, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement, as well as the UN Urban Agenda. As the EUSBSR is part of a wider region, being part of a wider territory it is part of a chain of developments. Today, PAs and HAs are taking some first steps towards integrating such global priorities into their plans. Nevertheless further links can be envisaged and kept in mind for the future.

Closer synergies between PAs, HAs and other Baltic Sea players. There may be further synergies not only between different PAs and HAs, but also between PAs and the priorities of other players. ‘Save the Sea’ has five PAs, while EUSBSR has in total 13 PAs. Clustering some PAs towards themes, would simplify the current thematic structure. This process will be endorsed by a political decision but will lie in the hands of EUSBSR key implementers and their close cooperation, joint discussions and unanimous agreements. Furthermore, taking ‘Save the Sea’ as an example and the role that HELCOM plays in environmental issues, some synergies could increase work efficiency with thematic focuses between PAs and HELCOM. An example is the PA Nutri, which works already closely with HELCOM. Again, this relies on EUSBSR key implementers first assessing what really needs to change.



***“HELCOM plays a big role in identifying overall priorities for the protection of Baltic Sea marine environment. In the EUSBSR, HELCOM is involved in the coordination of the HA Spatial Planning and also cooperates with PA Hazards, PA Nutri and PA Bioeconomy.”
Dmitry Frank-Kamenetsky, HELCOM***

Drive more processes. The need for a new flagship concept is already obvious. The shift from short-term projects with rigid priorities to processes, which are more long-term and continuous is already happening. Putting more efforts towards this will eventually lift EUSBSR in the policy loop, as part of a wider process towards policy changes.

Develop a lingua franca macro-regionalis. Harmonisation of terms and structures used across the PAs / HAs, but also across the macro-regional strategies would be helpful when designing the next steps. There is no harmonisation of terms in the four macro-regional strategies, nor a formalised way of involving the different players. Such harmonisation will also serve a communication purpose, as it can raise more awareness to the public.

Realise which governance structures are absolutely necessary and adequate. EUSBSR is a macro-regional strategy with a multi-level governance system, consisting of multiple layers for administration and implementation. Although the governance structure will be decided based on themes and priorities, simplification of the different elements would help. The Steering Group / Steering Committee meeting platforms are obviously integral to EUSBSR implementation. Given that they function as a liaison between the operational level and the national level, they can be a key part in the decision-making process loop. Steering Group / Steering Committee members are the PAFPs, together with experts, the European Commission and other regional players. A new structure could see PAFPs as only parts of the Steering Groups / Steering Committees, with a strengthened role but less tasks, while the European Commission participates directly in policy discussions and avoids double tasks. The Annual Forums could offer the opportunity for Steering Groups to participate and organise their meetings.

Internal communication is key for EUSBSR implementation. So far, it seems that a lot of effort has been made to communicate to the wider public the EUSBSR flagship results and outcomes, the added value of EUSBSR and good practices and experience that could apply to other strategies. However, the awareness of key players and implementers varies significantly. Some are very involved in implementation, participate in meetings and are aware of the procedures. Others may be unaware or hardly involved in the implementation process, despite their formal position and role. Additional efforts are needed for internal communication, i.e. to key implementers, who do not all seem to be aware of the Strategy, and those who are aware of the Strategy are not always aware or even involved in policy discussions with other levels.

People have the power - committed players at all levels to ensure EUSBSR implementation. Although many steps can be taken to simplify the thematic or governance structure, it is up to committed people, to the future EUSBSR ‘architects’ or ‘ambassadors’ to advance the key policy messages to the political and decision making level, to make EUSBSR run and operate and to ensure continuous processes. PACs are closest to the flagships and processes and can function as architects or brokers in this process, making the results known to decision-makers. At the same time, political support is necessary. For this, ownership and commitment of players at all levels is necessary.

What’s in it for the EUSBSR?

Following some initial simplification steps, EUSBSR will have a slightly simpler thematic and governance structure. The idea is not to entirely change the thematic focus, nor to restructure the governance. Instead, it is about adjusting as little as possible for priorities and future challenges, while at the same time simplifying the use of functioning governance structures. The overall ambition would be to avoid double work, both in thematic and governance terms, by capitalising on existing means. In short, this will mean:

- Clustering or merging several PAs, based on macro-regional needs and future challenges;
- Creating closer synergies between PAs and other organisations, e.g. HELCOM;
- Creating synergies between governance structures. For instance, raise the Steering Groups / Steering Committees to a governance level and reduce the tasks of PAFPs.
- Improving internal communication, both by harmonising different terms and structures and by increasing awareness among players.

The question here is, how much key EUSBSR implementers are ready to initiate discussions, and how committed they will be to further implement their decisions. Owning the responsibility of developing the right policy messages would be key for the first simplification steps.

Cultivate strong ownership and commitment through Thematic Partnerships - opening up

The EUSBSR functions under the 3 NOs that cover all macro-regional strategies, i.e. NO new institutions, NO new funding, NO new legislation. This presupposes that pure ownership of

the EUSBSR is in the hands of its members to best capitalise on existing structures and funds. The implementation of EUSBSR is a shared responsibility of all its members and their commitment is vital. Future implementation of the EUSBSR can further build on stronger ownership and commitment, respecting the 3 NOs.

Basis for the idea. The idea of Thematic Partnerships is inspired by the concept of partnerships developed under the EU Urban Agenda.³⁵ This has so far developed 12 partnerships on 12 themes that are relevant for urban areas, and where cooperation is beneficial. The themes are sustainable land use, public procurement, energy transition, climate adaptation, urban mobility, digital transition, circular economy, jobs and skills in the local economy, urban poverty, inclusion of migrants and refugees, housing and air quality.³⁶ These are the key delivery mechanisms within the Urban Agenda. Members of these partnerships are urban authorities, European organisations, EU Member States and Partner States, other umbrella organisations, knowledge organisations and others.

Open to committed players. The partnerships are based on voluntary participation and are open to interested and committed players. The idea aims for better regulation, better funding and better knowledge, making use of available sources. It is therefore clear that implementation depends on the people, i.e. on the commitment of its members.

What's in it for the EUSBSR?

Following the idea of the Thematic Partnerships means that EUSBSR will need to build on the commitment and ownership of its implementers, and further cultivate the macro-regional mindset. The idea is that committed players from all levels, e.g. local, regional, national authorities, ESIF Managing Authorities, regional organisations, research institutions and NGOs, can work together on a common theme of interest, while respecting the 3 NOs and the governance flexibility of EUSBSR. At the same time, players that are not fully committed are not 'forced' to join the Thematic Partnership just to tick another box in the representation requirements of participation.

Take existing practices a step further. Thematic Partnerships are not totally new to the EUSBSR. There is already a similar practice in EUSBSR implementation as flagship leaders also meet for different thematic purposes, while Steering Group meetings are based on themes of the different PAs. The Thematic Partnerships will take this idea a step further, building up the PAs along with such partnerships.

PAs can take the form of Thematic Partnerships. The current PAs can take the form of Thematic Partnerships. The number

of Thematic Partnerships will be up to EUSBSR implementers to decide, based on macro-regional cooperation needs and joint efforts. A similar current example would be the thematic platforms established under the Interreg Baltic Sea Region programme. The thematic simplification actions proposed earlier can still apply and Thematic Partnerships can be used for most themes.

Different governance levels work closely together. The Thematic Partnerships would allow for close cooperation at different governance levels, along with common discussion and meeting platforms. This enables players to be in direct contact with each other and should ease their work, as decision making processes will not have to go through further levels. They will be in the same Thematic Partnerships.

Give local and regional authorities a chance. Often there is little room for local and regional authorities to be involved in EUSBSR processes. Thematic Partnerships will enable local and regional levels to show their commitment as members of the Thematic Partnership, to be in direct contact with other governance levels and players and contribute to regional policy loops.

Thematic Partnerships can follow up simplification. Thematic Partnerships can also support simplification. They will be focused on a cluster of priorities most relevant for macro-regional cooperation, involving the minimum governance elements to deliver the envisaged outcomes.

Certainly, the key for long-term Thematic Partnerships lies in its members and their increased commitment. Without this, the idea risks transforming EUSBSR into another driverless vehicle.

Use existing funding via CPR Article 70 - convincing others

EUSBSR can capitalise on existing funding sources. However, finding funding resources, other than Interreg, for flagships can be challenging. Interesting flagships may not be supported due to lack of funding. The Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) offers a solution for financing flagships through ESI Funds, which is not fully exploited by the EUSBSR.

Basis for the idea. The idea of using Article 70 of the CPR comes from ESI Funds and is based on two factors. First, this initiative is being reviewed by EUSBSR and is not in uncharted waters, and second it aims to make the most of funding sources for cooperation. The alignment of funding is difficult, so Article 70 offers a lighter version. The idea also reflects a current initiative within EUSBSR, which covers the Managing Authority networks.

What is Article 70 about? This allows Managing Authorities of regional and national ESIF programmes to accept operations implemented outside their programme area, but within the European Union, as long as:

- The operation benefits the programme area;
- The amount allocated to the operation does not exceed 15% of the support from ERDF, CF and EMFF at the priority level or 5% from the EAFRD at the programme level;
- The monitoring committee agrees on the operation;
- Management, control and audit obligations are fulfilled by the authorities responsible for the programme that supports the operation.³⁷

What's in it for the EUSBSR?

Using CPR Article 70 opens a small window to additional funding resources for EUSBSR, which can be additional to Interreg.

Broadening the funding possibilities for operations. EUSBSR is largely implemented through its flagships. Finding adequate funding sources beyond Interreg to finance these can be a challenge, while interesting ideas risk not to be taken to the funding level. Certainly, other sources, such as Swedish Institute, LIFE, Horizon 2020 programmes or ESIF regional / national programmes can fund flagships. The use of Article 70 will broaden the funding opportunities through ESIF.

PACs and HACs to introduce this support tool. Some PAs and HAS are currently exploring this possibility. They can take this idea further and implement it in more initiatives. In close cooperation with the Managing Authorities the PACs and HACs can provide such support to flagships. This idea does not require any changes in governance or thematic structures and the simplification ideas described earlier can still apply.

Two questions remain. First, how far will Article 70 be part of post-2020 ESIF Regulations and what alternatives will be introduced that EUSBSR could take advantage of.

The second question is how to get political agreement to use Article 70. Here strong efforts must ensure political commitment more than for previous solutions, as decisions to use national / regional ESIF sources for operations beyond national borders are not always popular.

Use funding sources for coordination & flagships through a Macro-regional Integrated Territorial Investment - brave and daring

Macro-regional strategies are all but static. Future implementation of the EUSBSR needs to be built on the Strategy's flexibility and even take it a step further. Ideas have so far tried to address the needs of EUSBSR, respecting its very nature and flexibility. Certainly, implementing EUSBSR not only depends on the commitment of key players. It also relies on factors that drive this commitment, which in this case are the resources put into coordinating the different objectives and sub-objectives. It is often stressed that the resources to cover coordination and support of the different actions are insufficient, and sometimes not even enough to cover travel and meeting costs. This is where support for the work of PACs and HACs becomes necessary.

Basis for the idea. The idea of a Macro-regional Integrated Territorial Investment (M-ITI) is based on ESIF Integrated Territorial Investments (ITIs), introduced in the CPR. ITIs are a flexible tool to implement territorial strategies in a more integrated way.³⁸ They allow Member States to implement operational programmes in a cross-cutting way, drawing funding from different priority axes of different operational programmes. In this case, the Managing Authorities will need to be convinced to contribute to a M-ITI. For the programmes participating in a M-ITI, the Managing Authorities would dedicate a small part of their programme budget to the M-ITI. Bringing together the different contributions in one M-ITI budget, the strategy would be able to administrate a single budget which is fed by different ESIF programmes. In return, the M-ITI will report to the programmes.

In other words, ITIs allow a single pot of resources from ESIF or others to implement common agreed actions with the management support of a single instrument, assigned by the Managing Authority and the involved players. This needs three elements:

- **A territory and a strategy.** This means that the ITI is developed to functionally address the development needs of the area, building on synergies. There is no constraint on the strategy area, it can go beyond administrative borders, cover networks of cities or different geographical levels.
- **A package of actions.** ITI actions should contribute to operational programme thematic objectives and priorities and combine funding from different objectives and priorities. They can deliver support through grants, or financial instruments.

- **Governance for the ITI.** Although the Managing Authority has overall responsibility for the ITI, it may assign intermediate bodies to carry out tasks.³⁹

What's in it for the EUSBSR?

ITIs could bring many benefits to the EUSBSR, but would require some governance restructuring. This means that, contrary to the 3 NOs, the institutionalisation and funding of some structures is in place and makes use of existing funding sources. Especially when increases in the budget sound utopian, capitalising on existing sources seems ever more necessary.

How can an ITI be used under the EUSBSR? The ITI could cover the full EUSBSR, or there could be several ITIs for specific PAs. Both are explained below.

> M-ITI for the whole EUSBSR

Central institutional body for coordination. The development of an EUSBSR M-ITI would allow for a central implementation body, similar to a secretariat, responsible for coordinating the different actions and funding. This role can be taken by a group of interested and committed players, such as HACs and PACs, after internal discussions and agreement from Member States and in close cooperation with the relevant Managing Authorities. The HA Capacity for example, or any other HA, can take on this task.

Funding support for both coordination and funding of flagships. An EUSBSR M-ITI would provide EUSBSR with its 'own budget' from participating operational programmes and other funding sources. Funding will be for operations, such as flagships, but also for the players and coordinators, e.g. today's PACs and HACs, which could take the form of a secretariat.

> Different M-ITIs for several policy / thematic areas

An institutional coordination body for each policy / thematic area. Single M-ITIs per policy / thematic area would also need a coordination body. In this case, this coordination body could be an extended Steering Group, where members from the (current) PAs and HAs, PAFPs and experts from the region would participate. Alternatively, this role could be taken by the (current) PAs or HAs in close cooperation with their national level and the Managing Authorities.

Funding support for both coordination and flagships. Again, the M-ITIs could provide some funding for both the coordination body responsible for managing the ITIs, while it can also fund different operations and flagships.

> Summing up

Both cases offer significant flexibility but require strong co-operation and commitment. Either at the level of the whole EUSBSR or the level of individual PAs, an M-ITI can offer significant flexibility in implementing operations, strategy and PAs. This is mainly visible in the governance structure, based on fewer elements and supported by a resourced intermediate body. This, of course, would require strong cooperation among the different players, e.g. the intermediate body members and the flagship leaders, to ensure smooth implementation.

Even higher political commitment. Compared to the previous ideas, an M-ITI requires even stronger political commitment. Managing Authorities of all interested Member States must be convinced to dedicate part of their ESIF operational programme resources to the M-ITI.

Support from the regulations after 2020. Of course, the question here is whether the ESIF ITI tool will be available in the next programming period, or whether another alternative will be proposed.

Check for the development phase of the EUSBSR. An M-ITI would require a certain level of maturity and readiness from the EUSBSR to deal with responsibilities and administration. So it would be useful to reflect on the development phase, as explained earlier.

“Today, Thematic Coordinators are working much closer together developing the format with joint, macro-regional developing processes. For future this can be further enhanced and expanded through capacity building across all four macro-regional strategies.”

Anders Bergström, HAC Capacity, EUSBSR

Cross macro-regional exchange platform. Further ideas can be put on the table for future implementation of the EUSBSR. One idea is to establish a platform for addressing questions relevant in all macro-regional strategies, like capacity building, evaluation and monitoring, communication. This platform - facilitated by single coordination body - could develop harmonised approaches to the overarching matters listed above, while the implementation of the approaches would be adjusted in each of the macro-regional strategies separately. Day-to-day collaboration between single strategies is a prerequisite for success, and will require skilful facilitation. The EUSBSR the EUSDR, the EUSAIR and the EUSALP would largely benefit from a platform providing

the opportunity for continuous exchange of knowledge, learning and experiences.

Furthermore, additional capacity building actions in different forms can support implementation of EUSBSR and other macro-regional strategies in future. In times of change, the discussions need to stay open until the most realistic and viable solution is found. EUSBSR key implementers can now reconsider the strategy and make proposals to improve future implementation. No matter what the next steps will be, it is important to keep in mind that the EUSBSR is made up of its people. Individual engagement will bring institutional engagement.

The future is unknown, but it's up to us to create it. These ideas presented are an eye opener to consider in designing the future implementation of EUSBSR after 2020. The future is definitely unknown. However, by better understanding the present and better acknowledging the capacities and possibilities, the better EUSBSR can prepare for it.

Endnotes

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